

Dear Members of the Education Committee,

My name is Jessica Garnett and I live in Norwalk.

I am writing to you today to express my support of H.B. 5283, to ensure all students are funded based on their learning needs, and that they receive the full education funding they deserve.

I am proud to live in Connecticut, which is considered among the top 5 states in the country for K-12 education. However, every year in Norwalk we struggle to fund our education budget. Norwalk has a very large student population with high needs. These last two years have made the disparity in education funding between districts even more apparent. The wealthy towns that surround us were able to fully use Federal Covid funds to enhance education, while in Norwalk we had to stretch every dollar to fund day to day operations. All students deserve to be given the resources they need to experience the top-notch education we pride ourselves on. There should not be a \$5,000-\$6,000 difference in per pupil expenditures between a wealthy suburban district and urban school district. I'm certain that a simple glance at our ability to generate property tax revenue makes the case that Norwalk is also "affluent". Once you take a closer look at our student population you will see that for many children in Norwalk, school is the place they depend on for a hot meal. Not only do they get their educational needs met at school but for many their social emotional needs as well.

It is obvious that there are serious, structural racial and economic disparities between different districts across the state. Our educators, parents, and, most importantly, students, have had to navigate unprecedented situations in and out of the classroom, and for districts that do not have adequate resources to educate their students, these situations have been even more difficult. Norwalk did an excellent job getting kids safely back in the classroom but that came at a tremendous financial cost. For children who already had the deck stacked against them, the two years of Covid interrupted learning has impacted their academics, social skills, and lives in ways that we can't even imagine.

Eventually, federal funding is going to run out. More than ever, communities require greater resources to meet the needs of their students and they cannot wait for ECS dollars to be phased in over the next six years. We all know it is far easier to build up a child than to try and fix a broken adult. Our city needs to be adequately funded to meet the needs of our most vulnerable students. I am fortunate to be able to ask the city to raise my property taxes to generate more revenue for the school budget, but many families are not. Norwalk is unique in the vast difference in socioeconomics from one child to the next. We need funding based on true needs now more than ever!

The State of Connecticut needs to provide our students with the funding they need to be successful. I want my child to ALWAYS have access to counseling services, be able to study in a building that has enough ventilation, and to never have to adjust to their

teacher leaving midway through the year due to the undue stress that chronic underfunding has created.

All our students deserve to be funded based on what they need to be successful. English Learners, students who are economically disadvantaged, and students navigating through their education in communities that experience concentrated poverty all deserve to be funded at a level that makes a real, tangible difference. And this is true regardless of the type of public-school students attend.

Over the last few years, many have talked about the need for equity in our state, both racially and socio-economically. Equity starts with education and providing opportunities for ALL our students. I'm counting on all of you to take every single student into account when you're making decisions about how to fund education, and to give all our students a fighting chance to not only succeed but excel.

Funding our students fully, equitably, and immediately is long overdue, and I urge you to support H.B. 5283.

Sincerely,

Jessica Garnett